



Committed to the future of rural communities.

RURAL UTILITY PROGRAMS

DISTANCE LEARNING AND TELEMEDICINE (DLT) LOAN AND GRANT PROGRAM

The Distance Learning and Telemedicine (DLT) Loan and Grant Program was created to encourage, improve, and make affordable the use of telecommunications, computer networks and related technology for rural communities to improve access to education and/or medical services.

Background

The 1990 Farm Bill authorized the Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant Program to provide grants to rural schools and health care providers. The 1996 Farm Bill reauthorized the Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant Program and established a new loan component. The DLT helps rural schools and health care providers invest in telecommunications facilities and equipment to bring educational and medical resources to rural areas that otherwise might be unavailable.

Program Initiatives

The program is intended to fund projects which are primarily “dynamic”; i.e., those systems which deliver critically needed educational and medical services in rural areas through structured interactive educational training and/or medical professional presence over distances. Intermittent services which cannot readily show usage or tangible results such as community bulletin boards, or Internet Home pages, may be considered as adjuncts to dynamic systems, but would not be suitable as a primary purpose under the DLT.

The program facilitates “networking” of multiple dispersed sites over a geographic area, rather than a single stand-alone entity. Applicants must submit proposals, which, to the extent possible, maximize the number of geographically dispersed sites.

Projects must be driven from the “ground up”. For instance, applicants must document significant local community involvement and input in designing projects.

Projects funded are required to be self-sustaining without the need for further grant or loan funding. Ongoing costs for sustaining the proposed system, through user fees, tax assessments, school budgets, or other funding, should, to the extent possible, originate locally.

To ensure sustainable projects, USDA Rural Development endeavors to fund applications, which maximize system utilization, and benefits to rural residents. For example, projects which serve multi-purposes, such as providing adult education and vocational training, while also delivering K-12 and college courses, are highly desirable. Telemedicine systems could endeavor to provide professional training as well as medical care. Systems that also combine educational and telemedicine services, while not required, are also encouraged.

The DLT funds capital costs of acquiring and installing telecommunications hardware located at schools, hospitals, and other eligible sites. It also funds other non-recurring capital costs of establishing a distance learning and telemedicine system. System operating expenses, including salaries, are not eligible.

Applicants should fund telecommunications access and usage fees for network transmission facilities through revenue from the project, or from sources other than USDA Rural Development. Services should be provided through the local telephone telecommunication carrier, or other telecommunications provider.

Applicant Eligibility

- Rural schools, libraries, hospitals, health care clinics, and related organizations which operate rural educational or health care facilities.
- Indian tribes, consortiums or partnerships, and other incorporated organizations that operate educational or medical facilities in rural areas.
- The DLT is an exclusively rural program. Urban institutions are encouraged to participate as network partners; however, grant funding will be provided only to facilitate educational and/or medical services to rural areas.
- Funds will not be provided to State or Local governments; however, State supported institutions which provide educational and/or medical services to rural areas are eligible.

Distance Learning situations include, but are not limited to:

- Linking rural schools within regions to share limited teaching resources.
- Linking a rural school or a grouping of rural schools to institutions located in metropolitan or more populated centers.
- Utilizing rural libraries or other community facilities as distance learning centers, linking them with on-line resources or regional institutions.
- Utilizing job training centers, vocational schools, or other facilities incorporated by job training programs.

Telemedicine situations include, but are not limited to:

- Linking rural hospitals and medical clinics to major medical centers.
- Linking rural hospitals and medical clinics to experts (such as radiologists) located at other rural facilities.
- Clinical interactive video consultation.
- Distance training of rural health care providers.
- Management and transport of patient information.
- Linking rural facilities to medical expertise or library resources.

Types of Equipment Funded

The DLT is “hardware intensive”, but other costs, limited to the capital costs of establishing the project, such as software, training, and technical assistance, may be considered.

USDA Rural Development will fund up to 90% of the costs of acquiring eligible equipment for requested loans. USDA Rural Development will fund up to 70% of the costs of acquiring eligible equipment for grants, combination grant and loans, and all applications not specifically requesting loans. See 7 CFT Part 1703 for specific guidelines. Examples of eligible equipment: Equipment used for distance learning classrooms, such as encoding and decoding devices, specialized cameras and video monitors, video switchers, microphone mixers, computers and local area networking equipment. Equipment used for telemedicine systems for physician consultation, teleradiology, and education rural health care providers, such as teleradiology workstations, X-ray scanners, digital microscopes, and all of the above distance learning equipment.

Applications:

Detailed information and applications for financial assistance are available through local Rural Development offices.

All applications are considered without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, marital status, or physical or mental handicap (provided the applicant has the capacity to enter into legal contract) of the members of the groups applying for assistance, and service must be extended on the same basis.

For More Information

For more information contact:

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OR

Contact your local USDA Rural Development Office or the

USDA Rural Development State Office at:

USDA Rural Development

Attn: Community Program Division

Federal Building, Room 152

100 Centennial Mall North

Lincoln, NE 68508-3888

Phone: (402) 437-5556 (voice)

(402) 437-5093 (TDD)

National Office Web Site: <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rus>

Nebraska Rural Development Web Site: <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/ne>

Nebraska State Office Telephone Number: (402) 437-5551

Nebraska State Office Facsimile Number: (402) 437-5408

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